

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND DECISION RECORD
FOR
The Big Den Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project**
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2009-0020-EA

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Carson City District, Stillwater Field Office, has conducted an environmental assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2009-0020-EA, to evaluate the environmental impacts for a 2,607 acre fuels reduction and habitat restoration project on the west side of the Desatoya Mountains, Churchill County, Nevada. The project is part of a nationwide initiative to reduce wildland fire risk to communities and to restore and maintain the health of the land within fire-prone areas.

The vegetation density of the pinyon and juniper trees in the project area will be reduced or removed on up to 2,602 acres in order to modify fire behavior, improve wildlife habitat characteristics and protect sage grouse habitat. Hand and mechanical treatments will be utilized to promote healthy, productive and diverse habitats in the pinyon and juniper woodlands, sagebrush and riparian communities. Within the project area, pinyon and juniper trees will be cut and removed or lop and scattered and/or shredded. Shredded vegetation will be left in place to reduce dust generation and stabilize the soil surface.

The Park Canyon Spring is located adjacent to the proposed vegetation treatment area. A five acre fenced enclosure of the springhead and mesic soil type will be constructed and will comply with BLM wildlife fence standards. The spring brook currently flows past where the fence line will be constructed so livestock and wildlife outside the enclosure will have access to water.

The environmental analysis, DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2009-0020-EA, evaluates the impacts on the natural and human environment that could result from implementing this project. The EA considered two alternatives: The Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY

The Proposed Action described in DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2009-0020-EA is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (CRMP May 2001):

- FIR-2.1 Restore fire as an integral part of the ecosystem, improve the diversity of vegetation and to reduce fire hazard fuels.
- WLD-6.4 Wildlife habitat improvement projects will be guided, in the most part, by provisions in activity level plans such as habitat management plans, or interdisciplinary activity plans. These plans will be developed through consultation with interested parties and will be coordinated with livestock, wild horse, and wilderness plans. These plans will be focused on rehabilitation and improvement of wildlife habitat through protective fencing, water developments, grazing management, and vegetation treatments.
- FOR-1.1 Forest and woodland management will be based on the principles of multiple use, sustained yield, and ecosystem management.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION

Based on the analysis of the Big Den Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2009-0020-EA, I have determined that the action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context:

The Proposed Action is to implement a 2,607 acre fuels reduction and habitat restoration project. Hand and mechanical treatments will be utilized to reduce or remove the pinion and juniper trees on 2,602 acres and 5 acres around the Park Canyon Spring will be enclosed. This project is on public lands managed by the Carson City District, Stillwater Field Office.

Intensity:

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulation includes the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed any known threshold of significance, either beneficial or adverse.

2) The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety:

The project will reduce the risk of large, high severity wildland fire and restore wildlife habitat on 2,607 acres. No aspect of the project has been identified as having the potential to substantially and adversely affect public health or safety.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, prime or unique farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The project is not located near any resources that will be impacted by the Proposed Action. There is the potential for cultural sites within the project area but prior to implementation a survey will be completed to determine if the resources of concern are present. Design criteria, such as designating avoidance areas, will maintain their integrity and prevent adverse effects.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the Proposed Action on the human or natural environment were determined to be negligible. Based on our review of public comments and the project analysis, we do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment. There is no scientific controversy over the effects of the Proposed Action and local support exists for the project.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Similar projects conducted by the District and other BLM offices have exhibited the desired change in vegetation composition, structure and fuel loading. The analysis is based on our best use of available data and our previous experience with this type of fuels treatment project. The

level of risk associated with the implementation and results of this project are recognized and acceptable.

Vegetation and fuels treatments have been implemented for many years in the vegetation types typical of the project area and effects from those projects have been documented. These types of treatments have not shown any unique or unknown risks to the human environment. The effects from the Proposed Action are not significant because they are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or presents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

There has been no indication that a precedent for future actions with significant effects will be established by implementation of the Proposed Action.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

All resource values were evaluated for cumulative impacts and determined that cumulative impacts will be negligible.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

There is the potential for cultural sites within the project area but prior to implementation a survey will be completed to determine if the resources of concern are present. Design criteria, such as designating avoidance areas, will maintain their integrity and prevent adverse effects.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under ESA of 1973.*

As described in the EA, no known threatened/ endangered species (plant or animal), or critical habitat has been identified in the project area considered in the EA.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

As described in the EA, the Proposed Action does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement for protection of the environment. Officials from the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe were consulted on this proposal.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, a 2,607 acre fuels reduction and habitat restoration project on the west side of the Desatoya Mountains, Churchill County, Nevada. The project is presented in detail in the Proposed Action of the Big Den Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2009-0020-EA.

Rational

This decision will decrease the potential for an intense wildland fire in high value wildlife habitat and support sage grouse habitat management objectives. The National Fire Plan, Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001) – states in part:

Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability - The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve ecosystem sustainability, including its interrelated ecological, economic, and social components. In a similar fashion, the Bureau of Land Management's National Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy, November 2004, establishes a clear objective for management of sage grouse habitat on BLM managed public lands.

"Implementation of BLM's National Sage-grouse Strategy and the state-level Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategies will complement and expand the ongoing efforts to conserve sagebrush ecosystems on public lands administered by the BLM for the benefit of sage-grouse and other wildlife species." The current situation must be addressed or fuel loads will increase, understory vegetation will be stressed and depleted, and the stage will be set for a widespread destructive high intensity wildfire.

This project has been developed in collaboration with the Nevada Division of Wildlife, the Carson City District Fuels program, and the Stillwater Field Office Wildlife and Forestry programs. Written communication including a description of the Proposed Action and a map was provided to the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe on August 07, 2009. Consultation is ongoing.

BLM released a press release soliciting public comment on the proposed Big Den fuels reduction project and posted an information sheet for the project on the Carson City District Office's web page on August 28, 2009. Comments or issue identification were requested by September 14, 2009. No comments or issues were received for this project.

The grazing allotment permittee was sent the information sheet for the project on August 28, 2009. He is in full support of the proposed project.

The Big Den Environmental Assessment was sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse for proposal review on September 17, 2009. Comments were received by the Nevada Department of Wildlife and incorporated into the Proposed Action. The Nevada Department of Wildlife finds the project consistent with the Desatoya Habitat Management Plan, Nevada Mule Deer Plan, Nevada Antelope Species Plan, the Desatoya Sage Grouse Population Management Unit Plan and Nevada Action Plan.

Implementation of the Big Den Fuels Reduction and Habitat Restoration Project will reduce fuel loads, protect and improve wildlife habitat and woodland health, and restore ecological diversity in the project area.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

The decision to implement the Proposed Action may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals by following the guidance and procedures found in the Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR Part 4; Subparts A, B, and E) and on Form 1842-1.


Teresa J. Knutson

Field Manager
Stillwater Field Office


Date